

**Toby Merlin, M.D., Chairperson
Clinical Laboratory Improvement Advisory Committee
5400 Gibson Boulevard, S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108
(505) 262-7949:toby.merlin@lovelace.com**

April 10, 2002

The Honorable Tommy Thompson
Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing on behalf of the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Advisory Committee (CLIAC) to express our strong support for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Laboratory System (NLS). As you know, CLIAC was chartered in February 1992 to provide you and the Assistant Secretary of Health scientific and technical advice and guidance relative to quality laboratory practice. It is in this regard we applaud CDC's efforts to establish and promote an organized nationwide laboratory system to improve our private-sector and public health laboratories' capabilities and capacities to deliver critical and high quality public health testing.

The unprecedented September 11, 2001, attacks against our nation and the subsequent bioterrorism events involving anthrax have highlighted the importance of strengthening the U.S. public health infrastructure to ensure a coordinated and timely response to threats against our Nation's public health. An essential component to meeting this goal is the integration of the public health and medical care laboratory systems through sustainable linkages designed to facilitate collaborations and improve communication and quality laboratory testing at the federal, state and local levels. Over the past two years, CDC, through its Public Health Practice Program Office, has been working to address these issues through the National Laboratory System. NLS, through its strategic initiatives, utilizes professional laboratory organizations, federal partners, and federally-funded state projects to assess laboratory capabilities; address gaps in training; establish uniform standards of laboratory practice; and improve inter-laboratory collaborations and communications. Enclosed is a brochure that further describes NLS activities that are helping prepare the nation to better respond to public health threats such as biological terrorism, foodborne outbreaks, antimicrobial resistance, and chronic health issues.

CLIAC appreciates the significant efforts of Congress and the Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen the Nation's public health laboratory infrastructure through supplemental funding for bioterrorism preparedness and response activities. As well, the Committee thanks you for your support for the National Laboratory System. Only through sustained and long-term support can NLS achieve and maintain its goal of a nation-wide laboratory system capable of providing the communication, coordination and testing capacity necessary to rapidly detect and report outbreaks and exposures--all activities that are crucial to assuring the future health and safety of our communities.

Sincerely,

/S/ Toby Merlin, M.D.
Chairperson
Clinical Laboratory Improvement Advisory
Committee

Enclosure

Major Stakeholders:

- Association of Public Health Laboratories
- American Society for Clinical Pathology
- National Association of County and City Health Officials
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officers
- American Clinical Laboratory Association
- CDC National Center for Infectious Diseases
- American Society for Microbiology
- CDC Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Program

Endorsed by:

American Medical Association

American Academy of Family Practitioners

American College of Preventive Medicine

The Division of Laboratory Systems

Public Health Practice Program Office
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Robert Martin, MPH, DrPH, Director
Division of Laboratory Systems

John Ridderhof, DrPH, Associate Director
Office of Laboratory Systems Development
Division of Laboratory Systems

For Information Contact:

J. Rex Astles, PhD, FACB

NLS Coordinator, Office of Laboratory
Systems Development
Division of Laboratory Systems
4770 Buford Highway
Mailstop G-25
Atlanta, Georgia 30341
Tel: (770) 488-8052
Fax: (770) 488-8282
Email: JAstles@cdc.gov



“...We’ve got to increase our capability of dealing with infectious disease. The same things you need to prepare yourself for a viral terrorist incident, you need to do anyway to deal with the health of our people.”

Former Senator, Sam Nunn
The Atlanta Journal Constitution, September 26, 2001

*“Working Together to
Ensure Excellence in
Laboratory Practices for
a Healthy Tomorrow”*

STATEWIDE AND COMMUNITY PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS

*Ensure Nation is prepared for:
Bioterrorism
Infectious Disease Outbreaks
Public Health Threats
And Emergencies

*Guidance for Fiscal Year 2002 Supplemental Funds for
Public Health Preparedness and Response for Bioterrorism



The National Laboratory System was established to ensure a strong system of integrated public health, hospital, and independent laboratories. The goal is to strengthen critical testing and communication for public health issues through systematic improvements in the delivery of laboratory services. Facilitated collaboration among state public health laboratories and their clinical laboratory constituents fulfills the directive in recent government appropriations to integrate the work of clinical and public health laboratories to assure preparedness for bioterrorism through planning, training, coordination, communication, and standardization of methods.

The NLS is pro-active, allowing each state to prioritize its efforts towards bioterrorism and various public health threats such as foodborne diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and chronic health threats. It has flexibility of scope so that resources can be diverted to any public health crisis. Model projects have demonstrated that recent funding is best utilized to connect private and public health laboratories with a designated laboratory program advisor in each of the fifty states. Other components include a system for routine and emergency communication, advisory committees, ongoing laboratory training programs, and the National Laboratory Database, a comprehensive, state-centered inventory of laboratories, testing services and practices. The National Laboratory System is supported by the Division of Laboratory Systems within the Public Health Practice Program Office of the CDC.

National Laboratory System

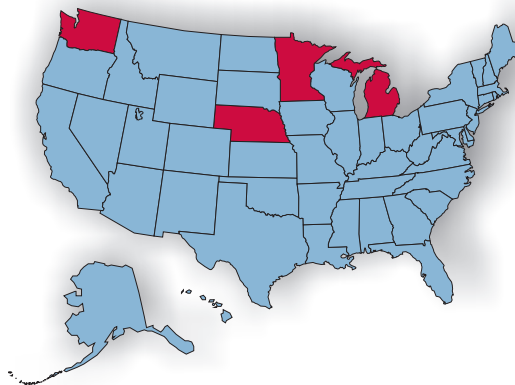
**Partnership of Public and Private Laboratories • Assessment and Monitoring of Capacity
Workforce Development • Promotion of Standards**

MISSION

To improve public health
through creation of
effective working relationships
between
clinical and public health
Laboratories

VISION

Assurance of the availability
of consistent laboratory capacity
for public health
across the Nation



The NLS focuses on testing services
responsive to potential biological terrorism,
foodborne outbreaks, emerging diseases,
and environmental exposures.

MODEL SITE ACTIVITIES

MINNESOTA, NEBRASKA, MICHIGAN, WASHINGTON

- Laboratory Program Advisors
- Universal laboratory assessment
- Expanded communication system
(e.g., blast e-mail and fax)
- Specimen transport system
- Education on unusual disease
- Ensuring effective testing and reporting
practices (e.g., Antimicrobial
susceptibility and *E. Coli* O157:H7)

Division of Laboratory Systems
<http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/dls/default.asp>